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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 008705

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [IZ](#) [EG](#) [IG](#)

SUBJECT: NEA A/S WELCH AND EGYPT'S FM ON ISRAEL-PALESTINE
PROGRESS, ARAB LEAGUE IRAQ PREPCON, AND SYRIA

Classified by Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone for reasons
[1](#). 4(b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: NEA A/S Welch discussed progress on Israeli-Palestinian issues, the Arab League sponsored Iraq prepcon, and Syria/Lebanon with Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit on November 17. Aboul Gheit praised the USG, and the Secretary in particular, for the November 15 Agreement on

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Movement and Access and said Egypt hopes the momentum will continue. Aboul Gheit said that although Egypt supports the Arab League sponsored prepcom, it would not necessarily be significant. End summary.

Israel, Palestine

[1](#)2. (C) During a November 17 meeting, NEA A/S Welch, joined by the Ambassador, briefed Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit on the Agreement on Movement and Access and plans for implementation. Aboul Gheit had effusive praise for the USG, and the Secretary in particular, for brokering the Agreement and asked A/S Welch to convey his deep appreciation for her efforts. He shared that he would have phoned her to congratulate her, but did not wish to call her at odd hours during her global travel. When A/S Welch asked Aboul Gheit to make a public statement of support for the Agreement, he readily agreed and noted that he had not done so only because Presidential spokesman Soliman Awad had already done so. (Note: The Egyptian Presidency's statement called the Agreement a "breakthrough." Aboul Gheit released his own public statement in support of the Agreement late on November [1](#)7. (Septel) End note.) Aboul Gheit also expressed support for General Dayton's expanded role under the new Agreement and said he would welcome a visit by Dayton to Cairo.

[1](#)3. (C) Discussing the outlook for further progress, A/S Welch said the GOI indicated it would neither interfere with nor support the upcoming elections. Aboul Gheit belittled the Israeli role, saying that Israeli "support" would be the "kiss of death." Welch responded that Israel could do much, such as facilitating the movement of people, that could be important to successful elections. Aboul Gheit urged that that all concerned should leave Hamas to "go political" because they would then gradually lay down their arms. If Hamas wins a significant share of the vote, Aboul Gheit said, we will see if their policies will undergo a transformation. Welch made clear our hope that Abu Mazen, not Hamas, would prevail in the elections.

[1](#)4. (C) Returning to the Agreement, A/S Welch said that it would not have been possible without GOI (and IDF) confidence in Egypt. Aboul Gheit agreed that GOI/GOE cooperation was strong and noted that Mofaz would visit Egypt again soon. Aboul Gheit expressed his hope that a search for a settlement would continue and that ongoing activity, such as discussions on the airport, progress on the harbor, and use of border crossings, would maintain the momentum for political progress. Aboul Gheit noted that when Egypt asked to join the Quartet, no one accepted. He recalled that the Secretary had indicated in their September 22 meeting that she had instructed people to prepare for Egypt's participation in the next meeting, but he gathered that the U.S. was reconsidering whether to include Egypt. A/S Welch reassured Aboul Gheit of Egypt's importance in the process and encouraged Egypt to consider joining at the level of envoys during the next meeting, possibly in December. A/S Welch noted that there would not be a pledging conference until possibly March of [1](#)2006.

Arab League Iraq Prepcon

[1](#)5. (C) Aboul Gheit said that although President Mubarak will speak during the opening ceremony of the Arab League Iraq prepcon, Egypt's role within the conference will not be prominent. A/S Welch pressed that speeches in the opening session by non-official political figures such as Harith al Dhari would be inappropriate. Welch made clear that we have no objection to the participation of such people in the closed, all-Iraqi sessions. Al Dhari and others could say

whatever they want there, and even to the world in the corridors. But they should not be put on a par with the elected Iraqi Government leaders and President Mubarak at the public opening session of the Arab League conference. Aboul Gheit said Iraqis not "stained with blood" should be able to speak and quarrel with one another. Without an open dialogue, Aboul Gheit remarked, the conference will be more for appearance than meaningful progress. A/S Welch said that the USG wants the precon to succeed, but does not want it to be public or to give the opposition a platform to suggest broader Arab backing against the Government of Iraq.

Syria/Lebanon

16. (C) Aboul Gheit reported that President Asad had ordered formal action to tighten procedures at Damascus airport against the entry of Arabs intending to join the Iraqi insurgency. The A/S expressed doubt and said the U.S. would appreciate any GOE effort to test the new system. Aboul Gheit admitted that such operations were not in his portfolio, but said he would ask whether any Egyptians had been returned from Damascus. Aboul Gheit and A/S Welch agreed that ending Syrian support for Hizballah is critical.

17. (U) A/S Welch cleared this cable.

RICCIARDONE